

Lesson Unit 1: Defining Buddhism and Theravāda

Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of the lesson students will be able to

- a. Introduce the diversity of Buddhism and the formation of Theravāda
- b. Distinguish Theravāda from other forms of Buddhism
- c. Define Theravāda Buddhism based on scholarly comments
- d. Identify and comments on the Scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism

Student Activities:

- Read each of the Readings carefully and underline/highlight the key words and concepts in each reading.
- Draw a mind-map around the main topic linking the key words and concepts that you underlined or highlighted in the readings showing their relationship to the main topic and also to each other.
- Prepare a chart on showing the Scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism.

My Journal on Theravāda Buddhism: As entries for your Journal, write detailed notes on the terms: Theravāda, Pali, Tipiṭaka, Buddha.

Reading 1: "Buddhism"

The term Buddhism identifies a diversity of accumulated traditions of beliefs, practices, institutions and values that have over the centuries been accrued around the name of the Buddha. It refers to whatever the 'Buddhists' have said, done, and held dear in various parts of the world and in various historical periods in the name of the Buddha. It gives unity to the overwhelming diversity that it has manifested as a pan-Asian religious tradition.

Since the beginning of 'Buddhism', Buddhists have concerned with living religiously with the aim of attaining deliverance in this very life or in a future life. They have created traditions of beliefs and practice that help them realize their aspiration. They built cities sanctified by monuments dedicated to the Buddha. They cultivated their crops using blessings that invoke the name Buddha. They wrote Buddhist poems, plays, commentaries, and works of grammar and logic that begin with invocations to the Buddha. They commended nonviolence, valued celibacy, and rejoiced in family life, all in the name of Buddha.

For showing the vastness of the diversity of the Buddhist beliefs and practices scholars have labeled Buddhism as a religion, a philosophy, a civilization, or a culture.

Identity of Buddhism

Buddhism has a cluster of ideas that are important enough to provide continuity through Buddhist history or give coherence to the variety. Among them the following could be highlighted:

- The teaching of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism.
- The monastic organization (Sangha), whose historical continuity provides a center of Buddhist practice and social basis for the persistence of Buddhist thought and values.
- The ideas of non-self and emptiness, realized through insight, that molded Buddhist behavior.
- The goal of nirvāṇa as the purpose of life.

There are several ways by which we could attempt to identify the characteristic order of Buddhism. One important way is to divide the cumulative Buddhist tradition into more manageable parts by chronology, by school, or by country.

Three Periods of Development

As practiced by the traditional historians of Buddhism, by following the philosophical developments, Buddhism could be divided into three periods:

1. The phase of the early Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda schools which emphasized the non-self idea and the reality of the constituents (*dharmas*) of the world.
2. The phase of the Mādhyamika school which introduced the idea of the ultimate emptiness of all phenomena.
3. The phase of the Vijñānavāda/Yogācāra school which was philosophically idealistic in character.

The severest limitation of this philosophical division is that it only touches certain aspects of Buddhism and acknowledges no significant development after the fifth century CE.

Three Vehicles

We could also identify the characteristic order of Buddhism through a schema based on polemical divisions within the Buddhist community. Accordingly there are three great Buddhist "vehicles" that are characterized by different understandings of the process and goal of salvation.

- The Hīnayāna, or Lesser Vehicle, elaborated a gradual process of individual deliverance, and in that context it distinguished among the attainment of an arahant, the attainment of a pratyekabuddha (one who achieves enlightenment on his own but does not become a teacher), and the attainment of a fully enlightened Buddha who teaches others the way to deliverance. The Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda schools are two of the major schools that are included under Hīnayāna. The term Hīnayāna was in its origins a pejorative name coined by the adherents of the Mahāyāna, or Great Vehicle.
- Mahayanists too elaborated a gradual path of deliverance lasting over many lifetimes. However, their emphasis was different in two very important and related respects. They held that an individual's soteriological process could be aided and abetted by "other power" and they recognized, ultimately, only one soteriological goal, the attainment of fully realized Buddhahood. The Mahayanists generated new texts and teachings and the Hinayanists rejected them.
- The Vajrayāna (Diamond Vehicle) is also known as Mantrayāna (Sacred Sounds Vehicle), Esoteric Buddhism, or Tantric Buddhism. It accepted the basic approach and goal of the Mahāyāna, but felt that individual realization could be accomplished more quickly, in some cases even in this present life. The Vajrayanists described the practices that lead to this attainment in the texts called tantras that were not accepted by either the Hīnayāna or the Mahāyāna schools.

Although this Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna schema is probably the most common one used to divide Buddhism into manageable segments, it undermines the significance of developments after the first millennium of the common era. It tends to over emphasize certain traits as extreme differences, beyond what is warranted by history.

Cultural Division of Buddhism

Buddhism has always been deeply shaped by its surrounding culture. It has shown an enduring tendency to adapt to local forms. As a result we can speak of a transformation of Buddhism in

various cultures. This cultural division of Buddhism into Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, and so forth has been most successfully applied to the more recent phases of Buddhist history, especially to contemporary developments. Its danger is that it conceals the Buddhist tradition's capacity to transcend the boundaries of culture, politics, and nationality.

Reading 2: Buddhism as Sectarian Religion

Early phase of Buddhism has been characterized as Sectarian religion for Buddhism began around the fifth or fourth century BCE as a small community that developed at a certain distance from other contemporary religious communities, as well as from the society, civilization, and culture with which it coexisted.

Buddhism remained a sectarian religion for around 150 years, until the time of Emperor Aśoka of the third century BCE. This was a crucial period in the sense that many elements and patterns that remained fundamental to subsequent phases of Buddhist thought and life were established.

We could discuss this early phase of Buddhist history under three topics: The source of authority that the new Buddhist community recognized, the pattern of development in its teaching and ecclesiastical structures, and attitude it took toward matters of political and social order.

Source of Authority

Buddhist community recognized the ascetic Gautama as the Buddha and his words as a new and ultimate source of sacred authority. The recognition of the Buddha's authority was based on an acceptance of the actuality and relative uniqueness of his person and career, and of his enlightenment experience in particular. It was based on the conviction that through his enlightenment he had gained insight into the Dharma. This included the aspect of truth that he had formulated more philosophically as, for example, in the teaching concerning the dependent co-arising of the various elements that constitute reality, and also the aspect of truth he had formulated more soteriologically, as summarized, for example, in the classic delineation of the Four Noble Truths. Finally, the Buddha's authority was based on the confidence that the teachings and actions that had flowed from his enlightenment had been accurately transmitted by those who had heard and seen them.

There were some challenges to the Buddha's authority. For example, there are numerous reports that even during his lifetime a more ascetically inclined cousin named Devadatta tried to take over leadership of the new movement. Such challenges were successfully met by the Buddha and by those who carried on the tradition. As a result later controversies concerned not so much the authority of his teachings and actions as their content and correct interpretation.

Three Interpretations on Early Buddhism

There are three conflicting interpretations concerning the content of the early Buddhist teaching and about the structure of the early Buddhist community.

- One interpretation is that early Buddhism was a movement of philosophically oriented **renouncers practicing a discipline of salvation** that subsequently degenerated into a popular religion.
- Second interpretation is that Buddhism was originally a popular religious movement that took form around the Buddha and his religiously inspiring message, **a movement that was subsequently co-opted by a monastic elite that transformed it into a rather lifeless clerical scholasticism.**

- Third interpretation argues that early Buddhist teaching combined philosophical and popular elements, and that during the earliest period that we can penetrate, Buddhist community included both a significant monastic and a significant lay component. This argument suggests that the philosophical/popular and monastic/lay dichotomies should be seen as complements rather than oppositions.

Sthaviravāda and Mahāsaṅghika Division

By the time of the Second Buddhist Council, held in the city of Vaiśālī probably in the fourth century BCE, the Buddhist community already encompassed two competing assemblies. A split occurred at or shortly after the Second Council: those who associate the original or true Buddhism with an elite monastic tradition, and those who associate it with a more democratic and populist tradition. The former position came to be known as Sthaviravādins or proponents of the Way of the Elders (Pali, Theravādins) and the latter position came to be known as the Mahāsaṅghikas or Members of the Great Assembly.

Within Sectarian Buddhism Elements towards Civilizational

During the pre-Aśokan period the Buddhist community was a specifically religious community only tangentially involved with issues of political order and social organization. However, it is not clear whether this distance was a matter of principle or simply an accident of history. As some see, early Buddhism's sectarian character was intrinsic, not circumstantial because early Buddhists were so preoccupied with individual deliverance, and the early monastic order so oriented toward otherworldly attainments. While individualistic and otherworldly strands played an important role in some segments of the early Buddhist community, there are balancing factors that must also be taken into account. Early Buddhists were concerned to gain royal patronage and were often successful in their efforts. They appropriated royal symbolism in their depiction of the Buddha and his career. They maintained their own explicitly anti-Brahmanic conception of kingship and social order. They encouraged a respect for authority and moral decorum conducive to civil order and tranquility. Thus within the sectarian Buddhism of early period, there were a number of elements that prepared the way for the civilizational Buddhism that began to emerge during the reign of Emperor Aśoka.

Transcending Boundaries

The sectarian pattern of Buddhism has continued for the reason that it has been reasserted at various points in Buddhist history. But Buddhism did not remain a purely sectarian religion.

With the reign of Emperor Aśoka, Buddhism entered a new phase of its history. It became a civilizational religion, that is, a religion that was associated with a sophisticated high culture and that transcended the boundaries of local regions and politics.

By the beginning of the common era Buddhism's civilizational character was well established in various areas of India and beyond. By the middle centuries of the first millennium CE, Buddhism as a civilizational religion had reached a high level of development across Asia. However, the signs of the transition to a new stage had already begun to appear by the sixth and seventh centuries CE.

Aśoka

Aśoka (r. circa 270-232 BCE) was the third ruler in a line of Mauryan emperors who established the first pan-Indian empire through military conquest. In one inscription, Aśoka renounced further violent conquest and made a commitment to the practice and propagation of Dharma. In other inscriptions Aśoka informs his subjects concerning the basic moral principles that form his vision of the Dharma. He mentions related meditational practices that he commends to his

subjects as well as festivals of Dharma that he sponsored. He also tells of sending special representatives to ensure that Dharma was appropriately practiced and taught by the various religious communities within his realm.

Buddhist Aśoka

The inscriptions give clear evidence that Aśoka became a Buddhist. His edicts indicate that he sponsored Buddhist missions to various areas not only within his own empire, but in the Greek-ruled areas of the northwest and in Sri Lanka to the south. They indicate that he maintained a special interest in the well-being and unity of the Buddhist Sangha, that he was concerned to emphasize the importance of Buddhist texts that dealt with lay morality, and that he undertook a royal pilgrimage to the sites associated with the great events in the Buddha's life.

Aśoka's actual policies and actions represent only one aspect of his impact in facilitating the transition of Buddhism from a sectarian religion to a civilizational religion. The other aspect is evidenced in the legends of Aśoka that appeared within the Buddhist community in the period following his death. These legends vary in character from one Buddhist tradition to another. But all of the various Aśokan legends present in dramatic form an ideal of Buddhist kingship correlated with an imperial Buddhism that is truly civilizational in character.

Three Developments

During the Aśokan and immediately post-Aśokan era there are at least three specific developments that sustained the transformation of Buddhism into a civilizational religion.

The first, a realignment in the structure of the religious community, involved **an innovation in the relationship and balance between the monastic order and its lay supporters**. Prior to the time of Aśoka the monastic order was the focus of Buddhist community life; the laity lacked any kind of independent institutional structure. As a result of the Aśokan experience, including both historical events and the idealized example he set as lay participant par excellence in the affairs of the Sangha, the Buddhist state came to provide an independent institution that could serve as a lay counterpoint and counterbalance to the order of monks. In addition, this realignment in the structure of the Buddhist community fostered the emergence of an important crosscutting distinction between monks and laypersons who were participants in the imperial-civilizational elite on the one hand, and ordinary monks and laypersons on the other.

The transformation of Buddhism into a civilizational religion also involved **doctrinal and scholastic factors**. During the Aśokan and post-Aśokan periods, factions within the monastic community began to formulate aspects of the teachings more precisely, and to develop those teachings into philosophies that attempted to explain all of reality in a coherent and logically defensible manner. As a result, the literature in which the community preserved its memory of the sermons of the Buddha (the Sūtras) and of its instructions to the monastic order (Vinaya) came to be supplemented by new scholastic texts known as Abhidharma (higher Dharma). Given the philosophical ambiguities of the received traditions, it was inevitable that contradictory doctrines would be put forward and that different religio-philosophical systems would be generated. This led to controversies within the community, and these controversies led to the proliferation of Buddhist schools and sub-schools. Some sources list a total of eighteen schools without any consistency in names. The institutional and ideological boundaries between groups and subgroups were probably very fluid.

Developments in **the areas of symbolism, architecture, and ritual were also significant components** in the transformation of Buddhism into a civilizational religion. Some changes were related to the support Buddhism received from its royal and elite supporters. For example, royal and elite patronage seems to have been crucial to the emergence of large monastic

establishments throughout India. Such support was also a central factor in the proliferation of stūpas, memorial monuments replete with cosmological and associated royal symbolism that represented the Buddha and were believed to contain a portion of his relics. These stūpas were an appropriate setting for the development of Buddhist art in which the Buddha was represented in aniconic forms such as a footprint, a Bodhi Tree, a royal throne, the wheel of the Dharma, and the like.

Merit making and related rituals proliferated and assumed new forms around these stūpas. Pilgrimages to the sacred sites associated with the great events of the Buddha's life became more popular. The veneration and contemplation of stūpas and other symbolic representations of the Buddha became increasingly widespread. Moreover, the notion of merit making itself was expanded so that it came to include not only merit making for oneself but the transfer of merit to deceased relatives and others as well.

Reading 3: Scholarly Definitions of Theravāda

Adopted from a paper by Peter Skilling

The term 'thera' does not refer to just any 'elders', but to a specific 'historical' or foundational group: the five hundred arahants who recited and collected the teachings of the Buddha at Rājagaha after the first rains-retreat after the death of the Buddha. This is stated, for example, in the Dīpavaṃsa, one of the early Chronicles of Sri Lanka: 'the Council performed by the Theras is called the Theravāda' (Dīpavaṃsa 4:8).

After describing the events of the First Rehearsal, Ven. Payutto writes (P.A. Payutto, *The Pali Canon: What a Buddhist Must Know*, Bangkok, 2003, p. 17): The teachings thus agreed upon that have been handed down to us are called Theravāda or 'the teachings laid down as principles of the Elders'. The word Elders in this context refers to those 500 Arahant elders participating in this First Rehearsal. The Buddhism that is based on the First Rehearsal mentioned above is called Theravāda Buddhism. In other words, the Buddha's teachings, namely the Doctrine and Discipline, both in letter and in spirit, that were thus rehearsed were to be remembered as such and strictly adhered to.

Michael B. Carrithers, "They will be Lords upon the Island: Buddhism in Sri Lanka," in *The World of Buddhism*

"The School of Elders is that school which, as Buddhism grew and expanded, continually inclined toward the conservative choice, the preservation of an archaic view of Doctrine and of the Order of monks, the Sangha. This view of the Doctrine is crystallized in the commentaries to the Canon, which were finally edited in Sri Lanka in the 5th century AD. These devoted to rejecting change, to certifying the original sense of every word of the Buddha. In the same spirit, the Sangha is conceived as a fraternity observing, in the minutest detail, its original way of life as conducted under the Buddha." (p. 133)

Richard Gombrich et al, "Buddhism in Ancient India," *World of Buddhism*

"The largest body of Buddhist literature to survive in an Indian language was that preserved in Sri Lanka by the Theravādin school. Its language is an early form of Middle Indo-Aryan called Pali, a word which until comparatively modern times actually meant '(Buddhist canonical) text' – as distinct from commentary. This Pali literature includes the only complete version of the Canon to come down to us in an Indian language; as we have seen, it was committed to writing in the 1st century BC. (p. 78)

"Several times in Buddhist history, hundreds of learned monks have assembled to rehearse the Canon (and its commentaries). Though these assemblies are referred to in English as Councils, they are really Communal Recitations. ...

The First Buddhist Council was held at Rājagṛha (modern Rājgir in Bihar) within a few months of the Buddha's Final Nirvāṇa; the Second at Vaisālī (also in Bihar) a century later. The function of the First Communal Recitation was to establish the Canon for the first time. The meeting was presided over by Mahā Kāśyapa, the senior monk alive, and the Canon was in effect created by his questioning other monks about what the Buddha had said. Upālī expounded the Vinaya Piṭaka – the Discipline – and Ānanda, the Buddha's personal attendant, expounded the Sūtra Piṭaka – the 'Basket of Religious Discourses', the Buddha's sermons and sayings. ... The third Basket, the Abhidhamma, consists of scholastic elaboration of the Doctrine." (pp. 78-79)

"There can be no doubt that the Pali Abhidhamma Piṭaka is apocryphal in the sense that it does not date from the First Council. Although all Buddhist schools and traditions share the Vinaya and Sutra Piṭakas, the texts of the Theravadin Abhidhamma Piṭaka are peculiar to that school; each school of Buddhism came to possess its own texts of abhidharma (systematic philosophy)." (p. 79)

"Broadly speaking, the essential contents of both (the Vinaya Piṭaka and the Sutta Piṭaka) are shared by all early Buddhist traditions. (The Mahāyāna paid less attention to the original Canon but never denied its authenticity.) Comparison between the various versions of texts that have survived (usually in Pali, Chinese and Tibetan; very occasionally in Sanskrit) shows that in both the Vinaya and the Sutra Piṭakas one can distinguish between a shared core, which is much the larger part, and a divergent periphery." (p. 79)

"... the fundamental Buddhist texts ... go back to a time before the Sangha divided, an event which can be dated to some time after the Second Council. It seems that this Second Communal Recitation may have been rather more creative than a mere repetition of the texts established at the First Council." (p. 79)

Andre Bareau, "Hīnayāna Buddhism" in *Buddhism and Asian History*,

"The first division of the community probably occurred toward the middle of the fourth century BCE, some time after the council of Vaisālī but having no direct connection with this event, ... The schism was probably caused by a number of disagreements on the nature of the arhats, who, according to some authorities, retained imperfections even though they had attained nirvāṇa in this world. Because they were more numerous, the supporters of these ideas formed a group called the Mahāsaṅghikas, "those of the larger community"; their opponents, who claimed to remain faithful to the teaching of the Buddha's first disciples and denied that the arahat could retain any imperfections, took the name Sthaviravādins, "those who speak as the elders" or "those who teach the doctrine of the old ones." (p. 197)

"The Sthaviravāda group seems to have remained united until about the beginning of the third century BCE, when the Vātsīputriyas, who maintained the existence of a quasi-autonomous "person" (pudgala) split off. A half century later, probably during the reign of Aśoka (consecrated c. 268 BCE), the Sarvastivādins also separated from the non-Vātsīputriya Sthaviravādins and settled in northwest India. This time the dispute was over the Sarvastivādin notion that "everything exists" (*sarvam asti*). In the beginning of the second century, the remaining Sthaviravādins, who appear to have taken at this time the name Vibhajyavādins, "those who teach discrimination," to distinguish themselves from the Sthaviravādins, found themselves divided once again. Out of this dispute were born the Mahisāsakas and the Dharmaguptakas, who opposed each other over whether the Buddha, properly speaking, belonged to the monastic

community and over the relative value of offerings made to the Blessed One and those made to the community.” (p. 198)

“Some of the Vibhajyavādins settled in southern India and Lanka in the mid-third century BCE and seem to have maintained fairly close relations for some time with the Mahīsāsakas, whose presence is attested in the same area. Adopting Pali as a canonical language and energetically claiming their teaching to be the strict orthodoxy, they took the name Theravādins, a Pali form of the Sanskrit Sthaviravādins. Like the Sthaviravādins, they suffered from internal squabbles and divisions: some years before the common era, the Abhayagirivāsins split from the Mahāvihāras, founded at the time of the arrival of Buddhism in Lanka; later, in the fourth century, the Jetavaniya appeared.” (p. 198).

Reading 4: Theravāda Scriptures

Introduction

As the tradition has it, just before the passing away, the Buddha told his disciples that thereafter the Dhamma would be their teacher. The early Arahants considered the Buddha's words the primary source of Dharma and Vinaya, and took great pains to formulate and transmit his teachings accurately. This has resulted in the formation of the currently available versions of the Canon preserved in the Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. The existing versions are sectarian variants of a corpus that grew and crystallized during the centuries of oral transmission.

Tipiṭaka

The word of the Buddha is threefold in terms of three baskets (Tipiṭaka). The Tipiṭaka contains the Sutta-piṭaka, Basket of texts which systematically groups the teaching of the Buddha, the Vinaya-piṭaka, Basket of the Discipline which contains the disciplinary rules in force in the Buddhist order; finally, the Abhidhamma-piṭaka, Basket of technical reflections on the Law which constitutes a thorough study and systematization of the teachings of the Suttas.

The antiquity of the Tipiṭaka

The classification of the writings into three Baskets indicates the presence of three different specialties within the early Buddhist community: doctrine, discipline and scholasticism. Very early in the history of Buddhism, monks specialized in one of the three disciplines. There were monks versed in the Suttas (*sutradhara* or *suttantika*), in the discipline (*vinayadhara*), and in catechetics or summaries which are the core of the scholasticism (*matikādhara*). Nonetheless, in the earliest texts, the three disciplines are still independent and follow their own traditions separately. They are not as yet qualified as baskets (*piṭaka*), and there is no question of the three baskets (*tipiṭaka*). These terms were to appear for the first time on Brahmi inscriptions the oldest of which date back to the second century BCE. The inscriptions use the old terms: Reciters (*bhāṇaka*, *bhanaka* or *bhānaka*); Knowers of the Suttas (*sutaṃtika*, *sutātika*, *sutātikinī*, *sūtātikinī*); Memorizers of the Vinaya (*vinayadhara*, *vinayaṃdhara* and possibly, *vināyaka*). Alongside these traditional terms, new ones appear which bear witness to the existence of one or even of three baskets of texts. We find the epithet *Peṭakin* (versed in the *Piṭaka*), and this concerns Trepiṭaka monks or Trepiṭikā nuns in Sarnath, Sravastī, and Mathura. Finally, there is a mention to a Traipiṭikopādhyāya (Master of Three Baskets). No reference is made to the Three Baskets either in the Pali or the Sanskrit literature, except in the post-canonical texts such as Suttanipata commentary (*piṭakattaya*), Visuddhimagga (*tipiṭakadhara*), Milindapanha (*tipiṭaka*), Divyavadana (*tripiṭika*, *tripiṭa*), and Avadānasataka (*tripiṭa*).

Structure of the Tipiṭaka

The Suttapiṭaka

The Suttapiṭaka got its name from the literary form, Suttanta, prevalent in the first four Nikāyas. The Suttapiṭaka is divided into five Nikāyas or groups of texts. The first four comprise mainly the discourses of the Buddha and his discussions with disciples and heretics alike. The last Nikāya comprises a large variety of heterogeneous texts.

The term Nikāya is typical for Theravāda to designate these subdivisions. Other schools prefer āgam. The Theravadins too, for example the commentator Buddhaghosa, use āgam. The five Nikāyas or āgams are as follows:

- Dighanikāya (group of long texts) – Dirghāgam
- Majjhimanikāya (group of middle length texts) – Madhyamāgam
- Samyuttanikāya (group of connected texts) – Samyuktāgam
- Anguttaranikāya (group of texts containing an increasing number of items) – Ekottarāgam
- Khuddakanikāya (group of small texts) – Ksudrakāgam/ Ksudrakapiṭaka

The Dighanikāya contains 34 suttantas, the Majjhimanikāya 152; the Samyuttanikāya, according to tradition, 7762, and the Anguttaranikāya 9557.

The Buddhist canon belongs to the class of anonymous literature. It has not been shaped by one single author, but it has been growing over a long period of time. The Suttantas of the Suttapiṭaka have been simply placed together. There are two different principles of the arrangement of the Suttantas. In the first three Nikāyas it is the decreasing length of the texts. In the Anguttaranikāya, sets of persons, things or concepts occurring once, twice, thrice etc, are grouped together in separate divisions.

The canon has been handed down orally for a considerable time. The Suttapiṭaka has been handed down by the Bhanakas or reciters who may have been the redactors of the texts too.

The Dighanikāya contains 34 Suttantas divided into three groups: *Silakkhandhavagga* (1-13), *Mahavagga* (14-23) and *Patikavagga* (24-34). The very first Suttanta of the Dighanikāya is the *Brahmajālasutta*. Each sutta begins with the phrase: Thus have I heard, and ends stating that the listener was delighted. The middle part of the Sutta is a formalized dialogue. More than half of the dialogues in the Dighanikāya are debates with Brahmins or with members of other sects. The second Vagga of the Dighanikāya contains texts relating to the legend of the life of the Buddha. The most prominent text of the Dighanikāya is the *Mahaparinibbānasutta*, the great text on the passing away of the Buddha. The Sutta contains the account on the last wandering of the Buddha, his food poisoning, finally his death at Kusinara, and the distribution of the relics. The *Aggannasutta* of the last Vagga of the Dighanikāya has received much attention for it contains important information on the caste system and on cosmology. The Vagga also contains the *Singalovadasutta*, text on the instruction of Singala, which treats the ethics for laymen and is called *gihivinaya*, Vinaya for the laity. The instruction is given in the form of questions and answers.

The Majjhimanikāya as a whole is longer than the Dighanikāya. It contains 152 individual Suttas. These Suttas are shorter than those of the Dighanikāya. The text is divided into three fifties: *Maha-pannasa* – great division of fifty texts (1-50), *Majjhimapannasa* – middle division of fifty texts (51-100), and *Uparipannasa* – further division of fifty texts (101-152). Each group of fifty is subdivided into groups of ten texts. Some of the texts are repetitions of some other texts. The content of the MN shows a much greater variety of topics than does DN.

The Samyuttanikāya is divided into five Vaggas which again are subdivided into Samyuttas. The Sagathavagga – division containing verses, Nidanavagga – division explaining the Nidana or Paticcasamuppāda, Khandhavagga –division explaining the five aggregates, Salayatanavagga – division explain the six sense organs with their objects

The Vinayapiṭaka

The Vinayapiṭaka, the Basket of the Discipline, has Buddhist law as its central topic and is divided into three parts: Suttavibhanga, Khandhaka and Parivara. The total length of the text is traditionally assumed to be 169 bhanavaras.

It is the purpose of the Vinaya to regulate the life within the community of monks and nuns as well as their relation to the laity. These rules may be divided broadly into two parts. The first part of the Vinaya contains the rules, which every single member of the sangha has to keep, and to the second part is concerned with legal procedures. Thus the first part refers to the individual members of the sangha, and the second one to the sangha as a whole.

The Suttavibhanga (exposition of the sutta) contains the Patimokkhasutta together with an old commentary on it. It is again divided into two: the Mahavibhanga (great explanation) or Bhikkhuvibhanga (explanation of the rules for monks) and Bhikkhunivibhanga (explanation of the rules for the nuns). The Bhikkhunivibhanga is much shorter because the rules to both the monks and nuns are not repeated in it.

The Patimokkhasutta is also called Matika. It contains 227 rules for monks and 311 rules for nuns. Every single monk has to know them by heart so to join in their recitation every fortnight on the Uposatha day. The rules of the Patimokkhasutta are arranged in seven groups, to which an enumeration of seven different legal procedures elaborated in the Khandhaka has been added as the eighth:

- (1) Four Parajika rules for monks and eight for nuns; consequence is expulsion. The rules of this first group are called rules referring to expulsion from the Sangha.
- (2) Thirteen Sanghadisesa rules for monks and seventeen for nuns; consequence is suspension. The meaning of the word is not clear. The traditional explanation is given as the rest, that is, the duration of the suspension is with the Sangha or as determined by the Sangha.
- (3) Two Aniyata rules for monks and none for nuns; consequence is according to the gravity of the offence
- (4) Thirty Nissaya-pacittiya rules for monks and also thirty for nuns; consequence is giving away a surplus
- (5) Ninety-two Suddha-pacittiya rules for monks and one hundred and sixty six rules for nuns; consequence is expiation
- (6) Four Patidesaniya rules for monks and eight rules for nuns; consequence is confession
- (7) Seventy-five Sekkhiya rules for monks and also seventy-five rules for nuns; consequence is none (wrong doing)

Seven Adhikaranasamathas for monks and also seven for nuns.

The legal structure of the Patimokkhasutta is quite obvious. The rules arranged in such a way that severest offences are named first and the lightest, the Sekkhiya (training), the rules relating only to a good behaviour in general are placed at the end.

The structure of the Suttavibhanga is determined by sequence of rules in the Patimokkhasutta upon which it comments. Every single rule is embedded in a text that begins with an introductory story describing the occasion on which the rule was prescribed by the Buddha.

Then follows the rule as such, which may be supplemented with additional conditions, and which is accompanied by a word for word explanation. Finally, exceptions to the rule or those of no offence are enumerated. Sometimes, there is further paragraph containing exemplary cases assumed to be solved by the Buddha, meant to give guidance to later Vinaya experts.

While the Suttavibhanga has grown around the Patimokkhasutta another important set of rules is found in the Khandha. These are the Kammavaca (Karmavakya). These rules have to be recited in different legal procedures of the Sangha such as is the ordination of monks. The Khandha is divided into two parts: Mahavagga (great division) and Cullavagga (small division). The Mahavagga contains ten Khandhakas and the Cullavagga contains twelve Khandhakas. The last two Khandhakas of the Cullavagga which give the account of the first two councils are considered later supplements. The Mahavagga begins with the enlightenment, which is the starting point for the foundation of the Buddhist order soon afterwards, and with the relevant rules for the ordination of monks. At the very end of the Cullavagga the account of the second council held at Vesali refers to the origins of Theravāda.

The Parivara (Appendix) is a highly technical text that has been put together from parts originally quite independent from each other and which sometimes even repeat the discussion of some Vinaya problems. The text concentrates on legal matters leaving aside all framework. At the end, the author or the redactor, named Dīpa is mentioned, who is not known otherwise.

The Parivara consists of 19 chapters. The text begins with question and answers without mentioning the Buddha or any other person. One of the questions concerning the tradition of the Vinaya is most important for the history of this text. A line of forty persons beginning with the Buddha and Upali is mentioned enumerating prominent Vinaya teachers. The last in the line is Sīvattthera, who may have lived in the 1st century AD.

Theravāda Abhidhamma piṭaka

Among the Abhidharmas which have come down to us, the most important are those of the Theravādins and Sarvāstivādins.

The Sinhalese Theravādins possess an Abhidhamma-piṭaka in seven books (pakaraṇa) which in the 5th century, Buddhaghosa and his school (Sumaṅgala-vilāsini I, 17; Atthasālini p.3; Samatapāsādikā p. 18) quoted in the following order:

- Dhammasaṅgani, classification of things
- Vibhaṅga, divisions
- Dhātukathā, discussion on the elements
- Puggalapaññatti, description of personalities
- Kathāvatthu, points of controversy
- Yamaka, twinned problems
- Patthāna, causal relations.

Nevertheless, the Chinese recension of the Samantapāsādikā (T 1462) adopts a different order:

- Dhammasaṅgani
- Vibhaṅga
- Dhātukathā
- Yamaka
- Patthāna
- Puggalapaññatti

Kathāvatthu

The Sinhalese chronicles preserves the traces of an Abhidhamma-piṭaka in six books only:

A manuscript of the Dīpavaṃsa (V, 37) records that after the council of Vaiśālī, the schismatic Mahāsaṅghikas rejected, among other texts, the abhidhamma-chappakaraṇam;

In the Atthasālini p.3, the orthodox monks asked the Viṇḍas of the Abhayagiri and Jetavana whether or not they accepted the Abhidhamma in six books.

In fact, it seems that the orthodox people considered the Dhātukathā as apocryphal (Saṃyutta Commentary II, 201-2: *tisso pana saṅgītiyo anārūḷham.... abuddha-vacanam pariatti-saddhamma-patirūpakam*)

Until the 5th century certain Sinhalese schools hesitated over the place they should give the Abhidhamma books.

- The orthodox monks formed a special piṭaka, the third;
- conversely, the Dīrghabhāṇakas ascribe it to the Khuddakanikāya, the fifth collection of the Suttapiṭaka (Sumaṅgalavilāsini I, 15).
- According to another division of the canon, the word of the Buddha comprised five collections altogether and the last included the whole of the Vinaya and Abhidhamma (Sumaṅgalavilāsini I, 23; Atthasālini p. 26; Samantapāsādikā p. 27), as well as the other texts of the Khuddaka.
- Still during Buddhaghosa's time, the Theras inserted certain episodes into the legend of the Buddha for the sole purpose of establishing the authenticity and antiquity of their abhidhamma.
- All the Lives of the Buddha agree that after his enlightenment, Sākyamuni devoted four or seven weeks to meditation, changing his residence each week.
- Furthermore the Atthasālini (p.31) asserts that the Abhidhamma was "grasped" (*adhigata*) at the foot of the Bodhi tree, at the time of the full moon of Visākha, by the omniscient Buddha, and "collated" (*vicita*) by him, near the Bodhimaṇḍa, during the fourth week which he passed in the Ratanaghara.

This detail is also confirmed by the Jataka Commentary (I, p.78).

The Abhidhamma which Sākyamuni discovered and collated was later propounded by him in the Trāyastriṃsa heaven and acquired by the disciple Sāriputra.

- The famous wonder of Saṃkasya is well-known to the hallowed legend and profusely represented on iconographical documents: Sākyamuni ascended to the Trāyastriṃsa heaven where he taught the Good Law to his mother Maya, who had been reborn in that paradise, then at the end of three months he came down to earth, again by a precious triple ladder, in the company of the gods Brahma and Indra.
- The Sinhalese Abhidhammikas tried to imbue this legendary episode with the value of a literary event: it was not the Law in general but the Seven Books of the Abhidhamma which the Buddha expounded to his mother. Once the instruction was over, each evening he went to Lake Anavatapta where he bathed then, during his rest, he communicated the contents of the discourse he had propounded to the great disciple

Sāriputra. The latter, having thus learned the Abhidhamma, transmitted it to his five hundred disciples who had remained on earth.

This Sinhalese modification of the legend is again found, with some variants, in the 5th century commentaries (Atthasālini p.16; Dhammapada Commentary III, pp. 222-3; Jātaka Commentary IV, 265).

The promulgation of the seven books of the Abhidhamma by the Buddha himself is in apparent contradiction with another Sinhalese tradition according to which the Kathāvatthuppakaraṇa, the fifth or last of the Seven Books, was "revealed" or "diffused" by Moggaliputta Tissa at the council of Pāṭaliputra, in the year 236 after the Nirvāṇa (Dpv., VII, 41, 56-8; Mhv., V, 278).

- This contradiction did not fail to draw the attention of the Sinhalese Viṇaya-vādins who were engaged in a controversy with the orthodox Theravādins and of which the Atthasālini (pp.3-6) has preserved the record.
- Since the Kathāvatthu, said the Viṇaya, was promulgated by Moggaliputta Tissa 218 years (sic) after the Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha, it is only the word of the disciples and should be rejected; if it is absolutely necessary to retain seven books in the Abhidhammapiṭaka, let us replace the Kathavatthu by either the Mahādhammahadaya or the Mahādhātukathā.

To which the Theravādins replied: The Kathāvatthu is indeed the word of the Buddha. When he was teaching the Seven Books and came to the Kathāvatthu, he merely established its summary (mātikaṃ ṭhapesi). By acting in that way, he foresaw that 218 (corr. 236) years after his death Moggaliputta Tissa would develop that treatise at the Council of Pāṭaliputra and give it a length comparable to that of the Dīrghanikāya by collating five hundred orthodox suttas and five hundred heterodox suttas. Therefore Tissa delineated the treatise, not on his own authority, but in accordance with the list of contents already established by the Master. Consequently, the Kathāvatthu is the word of the Buddha.

In their present form, the Seven Books of the Abhidhamma by no means present that canonical nature which tradition claims in their favour.

- In substance, they do not always merely classify systematically the psycho-physical phenomena which the suttas have already described, but they also attempt to specify the relationships which unite them.
- In this respect, the Paṭṭhāna which examines the twenty-four "connections" (pratyaya) between phenomena marks an undoubted progress in Buddhist scholasticism.
- By their form, the Abhidhammas are very like those summarizing suttas some specimens of which already figured in the earlier collections: Saṅgītisutta of the Dīgha, suttas No. 127, 137, 140, 148, 151 of the Majjhima and the majority of the suttas in the Anguttara.
- However, the Abhidhamma abounds in repetitions, rectifications, reclassifications and explanations which give it the character of an unfinished work still in the process of elaboration.
- Certain sections of the Dhammasaṅgani are only commentaries on previous sections, such as the appendix of the Atthakathākāṇḍa or Atthuddhāra which is devoted to an explanation of section III.

- The Vibhaṅga appears to be the continuation and partial repetition of the Dhammasaṅgani. Such work, incessantly repeated and never concluding, required many hands and extended over a period of time which it is impossible to specify, but which we have every reason to suppose must have been quite long.
- Hence the Kathāvatthu's object is to state and refute the heretical theses defended by twenty-six different schools and, if some of them had already been formulated at the time of Aśoka, such as the five theses of Mahādeva (Kathāvatthu II, 1-6, pp. 163-204), others resulted from the Vetullavāda heresy (Ibid., XVII, 6-10, pp. 549-56; XVIII, 1, pp. 559-60) which only appeared in Ceylon during the reign of Vohārikatissa in the second half of the third century A.D. (Dpv., XXII 43; Mhv., XXXVI 41).